

COACH AND BUS

The PSV Industry's News Weekly

WEEK

ISSUE 130 AUGUST 20 1994



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DESPITE its best efforts London Transport can no longer keep the lid on the growing rumours surrounding the favoured front-runners in the high-profile London Buses sell-off. There is no hiding the level of interest and mounting excitement has forced some informed speculative suggestions into the open.

If you pay too much attention to all the hearsay you could be forgiven for believing anything from Stagecoach winning all 10 companies through to the most unlikely cocktail of glamorous - and not so glamorous - consortia. Throughout recent weeks the *Coach and Bus Week* newsdesk has been inundated with tip offs as representatives from every UK bus group have been seen visiting London Buses garages with tape measure and calculator in hand.

Until now we have resisted all temptations to stir the rumour pot. But the dateline for the first official announcement draws near and the various permutations of companies and potential buyers is starting to take on a logical shape.

We print the list of frontrunners on page 5. But be warned, it is not guaranteed to be accurate. Previous privatisations teach us that there is many a slip between

'Put this in context alongside the five largest groups - Badgerline, Stagecoach, British Bus, West Midlands Travel and MTHL - with fleets ranging from over 1,000 to over 4,000 buses - and you suddenly appreciate that the acquisition of one (or two) LBL subsidiaries could have a spontaneous effect on the UK league table'

being bookies' favourite and winning the race.

Because it is London there is no doubt that the winners in the battle for control of the 10 LBL bus operating subsidiaries will hit the national headlines. It is capital interest which is out of proportion to the size of the companies involved. The largest, London General, has 600 buses, while the smallest, London Northern, has a 320-vehicle fleet.

Put this in context alongside the five largest groups - Badgerline, Stagecoach, British Bus, West Midlands Travel and MTHL - with fleets ranging from over 1,000 to over 4,000 buses - and you suddenly appreciate that the acquisition of one (or two) LBL subsidiaries could have a spontaneous effect on the UK league table.

The emerging pattern of bus company ownership is a pyramid with a few key players in control at the top and a large base of relatively small businesses with secure operations supplying clearly identified local market sectors.

One school of thought believes that the medium-sized companies will get squeezed. To survive they must continue to fight for a place at the top through either acquisition or expansion. If for no other reason the ripple effect from the winners and losers on the London stage will reach every outpost of UK coach and bus business.

Coach and Bus Week is published by Emap Response, part of Emap Business Communications, Wentworth House, Wentworth Street, Peterborough PE1 1DS
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ISSN 1351-3877

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Coach and Bus Week is available only by pre-paid subscription

Domestic subscription rate is £49 per year; Europe £92 and worldwide air mail £124. All rates include postage

Contributions should be sent to The Editor, *Coach and Bus Week*, Wentworth House, Wentworth Street, Peterborough PE1 1DS

The editor cannot accept responsibility for claims and statements by authors and manufacturers whose views do not necessarily represent those of the publisher, or for any mistakes or misprints, although every care is taken to ensure accuracy

Typesetting and origination: Meridian In Colour, Newark Road, Peterborough

Printing: Staples Printers, Kettering

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COACH AND BUS WEEK ENDING 20 AUGUST 1994

■ **New services introduced** in February by Trent Buses of Derby have stimulated travel between Hucknall and Nottingham, and independent research confirms up to 27 per cent of passengers are now travelling more often. Page 6

■ **MBC1, the company** run by the nephew of Mibbo Singh Thandi, has succeeded in persuading West Midland traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh to direct that revocation of the company's licence does not take effect pending the determination of an appeal to the Transport Tribunal. Page 7

■ **Four years of head-to-head competition** on Chester's open-top sightseeing tour have come to an end with the agreement of municipally-owned Chester City Transport and nationwide operator Guide Friday of Stratford to pool resources and offer an improved product. Page 8

■ **The first Scania FlexCi buses** to be sold in the UK are going into service with operators in York, Newcastle, Barnsley and Prestwick, fitted with Alexander, Northern Counties, and East Lancs bodywork. Wrights will also offer a body for the vehicle. Page 9

■ **An Office of Fair Trading** investigation into alleged anti-competitive behaviour in the travel industry has concluded action need not be taken. On Tour news, page 11

COACH AND BUS EVENTS

● September 3-11: IAA international motor show, Hanover. Details from Verband der Automobilindustrie eV (VDA), tel 010 69 7570-264/265/267/277 or fax 010 69 7570-320

● September 12-16: PTRC annual conference, renamed 22nd European Transport Forum, University of Warwick. Details from Zofia Duszynska, PTRC, on 081 741 1516

● September 24: Celebration of 40 years of the Routemaster bus. The RMOOA, in conjunction with the London Transport Museum. For details send an SAE to Andrew Morgan, Secretary, Routemaster Operators & Owners Association, PO Box 582, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 4BG

● September 27: Omnibus Society Meeting. Victoria Coach Station - Refurbishment and Beyond, Warwick Hillman, VCS managing director - 6.45pm, London Transport, 55 Broadway, London SW1. Details from Barry Le Jeune on 071 918 3295

● October 12-16: Mitcar, Parc des Expositions, Paris, France. Details from Mitcar-MitFrance 1994, 1 Avenue Edouard Belin, 92856 Rueil Malmaison, Paris. Fax +33 1 41 29 96 68

● October 20-22: Expo Coach 94, Telford Exhibition Centre, Shropshire. Details from Apple Associates on 0768 892248

● October 25: Omnibus Society Meeting. National Express - Initiatives for Growth, Stuart Render, press and public relations manager - 6.45pm, London Transport, 55 Broadway, London SW1. Details from Barry Le Jeune on 071 918 3295

● October 26-31: Autobus RAI, Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre. Details from Amsterdam RAI, Project Management Department, Autobus RAI 94 Maastricht, PO Box 77777, 1070 MS Amsterdam, tel +31 (0)20 549 1212

● December 3 & 4: Coach Industry Awards, Queens Hotel, Leeds. Organised by Coach and Bus Week in association with Coach Tourism Council. Details from Chrissie Hester on 0733 63100

GAG and OK signal Auckland war end

By Andrew Jarosz

THE north-eastern bus war between Go-Ahead Gateshead and OK Travel comes to an end this weekend, after less than two months competitive activity (*Coach and Bus Week*, June 25). Both sides have agreed to call it a draw and are returning to an early 1994 position.

GAG subsidiary Go-Ahead Gateshead had introduced services deep into OK's territory at Bishop Auckland, and had established an outstation in the town to run a frequent service to West Auckland.

New Optare Sigmas had also been drafted on the trunk service from Newcas-

tle to Bishop Auckland in reply to the continually growing number of OK services being introduced in Gateshead. Both companies have agreed to return to an earlier position, with OK cancelling unused registrations which would have added another 15 vehicles to Gateshead local services and withdrawing two services recently introduced from the Dunston Metro Centre to south and east Gateshead.

In turn, GAG is withdrawing its Newcastle to Bishop Auckland route and the local service to West

Auckland. The Optare Sigmas, which created the high-profile competitive service are now being dedicated to branded services in the Low Fell area, where they are displacing double-deck MCW Metrobuses.

GAG director and general manager Paul Matthews praised the effort of staff at the new outstation. "In a way, it was very tempting to maintain our presence as it was a very successful low-cost unit, but we have offered permanent posts to all our new recruits, as we didn't want them to become victims of their own success," he said.



Sigmas will be redeployed to Low Fell

■ COACH

Winners: whisky galore

COACH Industry Awards entries continue to flood into the *Coach and Bus Week* office and the 12 winners of a bottle of whisky as their reward for being quick off the mark have been announced.

Although the 31 July deadline has passed, late entries are to be considered, though readers are advised to hurry because the judges will start their deliberations before the end of August.

Lucky readers scheduled to receive their free bottles of malt are:

- Mark Henderson of First Leisure Corporation;
- Lee Wale of Harry Shaw



COACH AND BUS WEEK
**COACH
INDUSTRY
AWARDS**
1994
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE COACH TOURISM COUNCIL

Travel;

- George Hurst of Warrington Borough Transport Ltd;
- Lee Sparrow of Success Tours, Trowbridge;
- David Allan of Prindale Coaches, Castleford;
- Joseph McIvor of Global Mini Tours, Stockton-on-Tees;
- Richard Wootton of Hunsbury Coach Travel, Northampton;
- Frank Potter of Zeroth

Ltd, Kirkmichael;

- Ian Wiseman of Cotsworld Travel/Fourwinds Holidays, Gloucester;
- Andrew Wilkinson of Firth Continent Marketing Services, Hythe;
- Bill Varney of Biss

Bros Coaches, Bishop's Stortford;

- Ian Wilson of GM Buses South Ltd, Manchester.

■ Do not forget that important date for your diary: On December 3 and 4, 1994 *Coach and Bus Week* in association with the Coach Tourism Council presents the first Coach Industry Awards at the Queens Hotel, Leeds.

CBW

■ OBITUARY

Stuart Scott

MIDLAND Red (North) business development manager Stuart Scott has died after a short illness. A well-respected figure in the bus industry, he joined City of Oxford Motor Services in the early 1970s.

In 1985, he was seconded to the Southern Region headquarters of NBC, where he worked on the development of minibus services under the direction of John Hargreaves.

After deregulation he joined Devon General and was influential in the establishing of Thames Transit. In 1990 he joined Drawlane Transport where he worked in Bee Line Buzz, Manchester. He then acted as a consultant to Southern National.

Exactly one year before his death, he joined Midland Red (North) where he worked again with his friend Richard Bowler who he had first met in Oxford.

He leaves his wife, Ros, and three daughters.

Speaking at Mr Scott's funeral, Richard Bowler said: "I soon came to respect him as an innovative businessman, who was always ready to give his all to the job in hand."

■ COACH AND BUS

Stevensons pulling out of the West Midlands

By Richard Simpson

BRITISH Bus subsidiary Stevensons of Uttoxeter is pulling out of the West Midlands conurbation.

One hundred and fifty jobs will go and notice of service cancellation was given to the traffic commissioner on Monday.

It has also sold its Sealandair coaching business to the Birmingham Coach Company on a transfer of undertakings basis.

Managing director Mark Bowd said: "The huge investment in the West Midlands in vehicles and property has been a serious drain on the group's profits."

"Unfortunately the resulting revenue has not justified the investment and therefore the commercial decision to cease trading and cut our losses has had to be made."

Four freehold depots, home to around 100 vehicles at Willenhall, West Bromwich and Smethwick, will close.

Prior to its takeover by British Bus, Stevensons had



invested some £4 million in its West Midlands operations. This was widely seen as having provoked WMT's launch of competitive services through its subsidiary Your Bus in Burton-upon-Trent, which is also to come to an end (*Coach and Bus Week*, August 13).

WMT is now expected to come in and fill the gaps created by Stevensons' withdrawal.

Managing director Don Colston did not rule out the possibility that WMT might acquire one or more of the Stevensons depots: "We will take up any opportunity released by any change in the activities of British Bus," he said.

The rationalisation leaves Stevensons with depots in Burton-upon-Trent, Swadlincote, Uttoxeter, Rugeley

and Burslem, plus its operations in Edinburgh.

Mr Bowd said: "The staff have reacted as positively as could be expected under the circumstances. The future for the reshaped company now looks far brighter."

■ STEVENSONS' coaching arm, Sealandair, has been sold to Geoff Howle's Birmingham Coach Company.

The deal includes schools contracts with Hereford and Worcestershire County Council, Sandwell Borough Council, Birmingham County Council and Staffordshire County Council, and the Colletts and Classic Coaches names.

No property was involved in the deal.

Mr Howle said negotiations were continuing on how many coaches and staff would be taken on, but up to six Sealandair Volvos could join his company.

"The acquisition will strengthen our position as Birmingham's leading coach company, and restores the balance in turnover between our coach and bus operations."

■ BUS

London favourites

A MANAGEMENT bid emerged as favourite to buy London Buses subsidiary CentreWest as *Coach and Bus Week* went to press.

Although no-one at CentreWest or London Buses would comment, *Coach and Bus Week* understands that the team, led by CentreWest managing director Peter Hendy, is likely to be the only successful internal bidder.

Frontrunners for the other nine companies are reported as: **Leaside** - Cowie Group, which already owns Grey-Green and provided backing for the management buyouts at London Coaches and Westlink. **East London** - Stagecoach, or a management team led by md Roger Bowker. **London General** - British

Bus. **Metrolink** - British Bus. **London United** - MTHL. **London Central** - Go-Ahead Group. **London Northern** - MTHL. **Selkent** - Stagecoach. **South London** - GRT.

GRT is thought to have outbid British Bus for London General, but would be unable to buy both it and South London as they are contiguous companies. Metrolink would sit very nicely alongside the former London Country operating area now controlled by British Bus.

It must be emphasised that the above list, although the most accurate available as *Coach and Bus Week* went to press, is not an official one. In any case, the top bidder at this stage may not necessarily be the final purchaser.

■ BUS

BHT goes into liquidation

THE withdrawal of backers and cutthroat competition have been blamed by Bournemouth Heritage Transport for its demise. The company has gone into voluntary liquidation owing money to its backer, Clydeside 2000, which has retrieved vehicles on loan to the company.

Clydeside 2000 chief executive Graham Cumming said: "We have been unhappy for a few months with our involvement in the company. All support has been withdrawn and we will be picking up our vehicles."

Buses were loaned to the company under an agreement made with Clydeside's general manager George Watson, who left shortly before the company's withdrawal from Bournemouth.

BHT, which had 35 staff and operated 23 vehicles, blamed Bournemouth municipal Yellow Buses for the collapse. The firm had been challenging Yellow Buses on four prime routes since May 1993. Yellow Buses finance director Roy Edgley said: "I

don't believe there has been a ferocious bus war. They registered four routes which directly attacked our major revenue earners and we responded."

The company has been put into the hands of liquidators, Apple Corporate Management. **CBW**



BHT provoked a vigorous response

■ GREATER Manchester Transport Executive's Ashton-under-Lyne bus station has been moved to an adjacent site to make way for an enlarged shopping centre development. Demolition of the former bus station, opened only nine years ago, will make way for the new Arcades shopping centre. The new £2 million bus station will be officially opened at the end of this month.

■ AUTOGLASS has opened the first centre dedicated to coach and bus glass repair. The Crawley-based centre stocks all makes of glass and offers same-day service. The centre has the largest fitting unit in the country, providing a 24-hour roadside emergency service.

■ EDDIE Brown Tours has specified seatbelts on all seats of two new coaches ordered for March 1995. The two Plaxton Premiere-bodied Volvo B10M GLs have 53 reclining seats and are destined for UK private hire and excursion work with the Helperby, North Yorkshire company. They will be supplied through Kirkby Coach & Bus.

■ REFURBISHMENT work between junction 3 and 4 of the M4 will continue for the next six weeks. To minimise disruption a contraflow will operate with two lanes in each direction being maintained between 5am and 10pm and at least one lane in the other direction being maintained at all other times. Work is being carried out to resurface and install new lights, drainage and central reserve fencing.

■ PLANS for a £3.5 million hotel and conference centre in Perth could spell relocation for the town's Leonard Street bus station. The planning application, submitted by the Lovat Hotels group, centres on the Queen's Hotel in Perth. Also key to the development, however, would be a takeover of the adjacent bus station, which is owned by the local district council and leased to Strathgry Scottish.

■ THE Vehicle Inspectorate has recalled Mercedes 811D bus conversions fitted with Allison AT 542 automatic transmissions. It was found the main starter cable may come into contact with the exhaust system with a consequential risk of fire.

BUS

Research pays off

By Andrew Jarosz

NEW services introduced in February by Trent Buses of Derby have stimulated travel between Hucknall and Nottingham, and independent research confirms that up to 27 per cent of passengers are now travelling more often.

Trent reshaped the Hucknall local network and direct services to Nottingham by offering better frequencies, faster journeys and a new day ticket for unlimited travel.

The postal poll, sent to

hundreds of Hucknall homes, gave people the chance to express their likes and dislikes, and asked whether their travel habits had changed since the new routes started.

More than one person in four said they were using the bus more often, and one third of all travellers used the new day ticket and praised its value for money.

Fifty per cent of respondents said they had more buses to choose from and 44 per cent said they had benefited from faster journey times. Only nine per cent



Passengers 'using bus more often'

thought the new routes did not suit them better.

There was also additional praise for smart and friendly drivers, interior cleanliness of buses and timetables that were easier to understand.

Trent marketing manager Melvyn Hopwood

admitted that there were a few teething problems at the start: "We have put a lot of effort into customer research before and after the changes. We know that we are now carrying more people, and it is pleasing to see that doing our homework has paid off," he said.

COACH

An entertaining concept

GROWING success in the corporate entertainment market has led Coach Stop to add a second Scania to its 10-strong fleet.

The Scania Century, named Fleur de Leigh after Coach Stop proprietor Gail Hopes' home town of Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, features a distinctive two-tone smoke pink livery with a dragonfly motif.

Inside the Spanish-built Irizar body, 32 semi-reclining seats are arranged around

eight tables. The parallel seating arrangement effectively gives groups of eight seats, making the coach the ideal venue for informal discussions or entertainment. Lap belts are fitted, even to rear-facing seats.

Other interior refinements include full air-conditioning, two-screen video, floor-mounted toilet, rear kitchen with two sinks, microwave, a large fridge, water boiler and bar optics.



Fleur de Leigh: Coach Stop's second Scania

COACH

New body type for UK market

SCANIA is poised to launch a new body type on to the UK market via its Workshop distributor. Don MacIntosh, managing director of Scania Coach Sales Ltd, said the K93 coach (which has not

been available since last August) would be relaunched in October with a charge-cooled 280 bhp Euro 2 engine.

It would be available with two body makes; Van

Hool, and another "new to the UK market."

Mr MacIntosh added that sales of the Irizar-bodied Scania Century had hit target, with 20 units sold so far.

BUS

Winner buys three vehicles

DERBYSHIRE operator Glossopdale Bus has celebrated winning second prize in the Small Business of the Year competition (Coach and Bus Week, 6 August) by purchasing its first new vehicles since the business started.

Three Marshall-bodied Mercedes midibuses are dedicated to the Derbyshire County Council supported service from Glossop to Stockport. The two 711s seating 27 and the 811 seating 33 are finished to full tendered services specification for Derbyshire and greater Manchester PTE.

In addition to three commercial local services around Glossop, the company operates a commercial service to Ashton-under-Lyne and the supported service to Stockport. A new tendered evening service from Stockport to Altrincham has been won and starts next month.

CBW

■ BUS

Revocation of O-licence suspended until appeal

MBC1, the company run by the nephew of Mibbo Singh Thandi, has succeeded in persuading West Midlands traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh not to revoke the company's licence pending an appeal to the Transport Tribunal.

Mr Pugh had revoked the licence on grounds of finance. He said £4,892.59 was owed to the Busmasters season ticket scheme by the company, which trades as The Midland Bus Co, of 74 Regis Heath Road, Rowley Regis, Warley.

In addition the insurance situation was "cloudy to say the least" and it was apparent that MBC1 was run-

By Michael Jewell

ning side by side with Mibbo Singh Thandi's Transol.

Director Ajmar Singh Thandi said there were dif-

ficulties in insuring MBC1 but new insurance brokers in Liverpool were prepared to insure vehicles in his own name.

He also said he was

willing to pay Busmasters the money owed in full.

Asked whether his uncle's Transol and MBC1 were intertwined, Mr Ajmar Thandi said they made their own decisions but they were intertwined, especially in regard to insurance.

Mibbo Singh Thandi gave an assurance that he would not interfere with Ajmar's operations.

Mr Ajmar Thandi said he intended to seek a licence in his own name and then withdraw the appeal.

■ See Licensing & Legal, pages 31&32.



MBC1 and Transol intertwined

■ SCOTT Dunn, 20-year-old son of Dunn-Line director Bob Dunn, has reached the final of the National Automotive Technician Competition. Since March this year he has also been a director of the Nottingham-based company. The final on 14 and 15 September 1994 is at Motec, High Ercall, Shropshire. Success would allow Mr Dunn to represent his country as part of the Skill Olympic Team.

■ THE Government appears determined to press ahead with motorway toll charging, in spite of a Transport Select Committee report suggesting that increasing fuel tax might be a more effective way to reduce congestion, as motorway tolls might drive traffic on to more minor roads.

■ ROAD traffic in the second quarter of 1994 was five per cent up on the same period last year, according to provisional Department of Transport figures. The increase is accounted for by rises of five per cent in car traffic and eight per cent in goods vehicle movement. After seasonal adjustment, total motor traffic in the second quarter of 1994 increased from the first quarter level, continuing 1993's upward trend.

■ UNIFORMS Unlimited of London is to provide uniform clothing to Southampton Transport, Harrogate Transport, TMS, Tees, United, London Suburban and Liverbus. Every driver at each of the operators is to be individually fitted with uniform clothing by the company.

■ THE Local Vehicle Registration Offices, which currently handle the registration of new coaches and buses, will all be closed by 1998, with the loss of around 1,500 jobs. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency says that, by April 1996, an alternative system to handle coach and bus registrations will be in place.

■ PLANS to bring trams to Bristol have been revitalised, with Bristol Development Corporation considering proposals for a £3 million system to bring up to 1,000 passengers per hour through the city centre. Parry Associates of the West Midlands is behind the scheme.

■ BUS

Flagship response

YORKSHIRE Rider has responded to Blue Bus by upgrading its Marsden corridor and introducing a new service.

Rider's Flagship services guarantee better quality and have already been introduced in other areas, notably Halifax, Bradford and York (*Coach and Bus Week*, 25 June).

This has been coupled with the introduction of travelcards designed to win passenger loyalty. In addition to the introduction of a new service to Slaithwaite, which runs directly ahead of Blue Bus, the Badgerline subsidiary converted five other corridor routes to Flagship standard this week, offering punctuality and higher standards of service, backed by a money-back guarantee.

Huddersfield general manager Ray O'Toole said staff had been through a training course to offer a better service.

■ BUS

Huddersfield targeted

BLUE Bus and Coach Services of Horwich has opened its attack on the Huddersfield area with a route from Dobcross and Marsden to Huddersfield, as a prelude to establishing a full West Yorkshire network.

Yorkshire Blue Bus is currently seeking an O-licence (*Coach and Bus Week*, 9 July) and has plans to take over Pride of the Road's Huddersfield depot.

Meanwhile, it is using temporary premises in Huddersfield to operate a service which has been registered as originating in the North West Traffic Area.

The Marsden service is operated on a 15-minute frequency, with occasional workings crossing the Pennines to Dobcross. The route competes with numerous services of Badgerline subsidiary Yorkshire Rider, which is the long-established provider of services along the corridor.

Nine staff have been taken on under the management of managing director's son Andrew Jarvis. Six buses, including a Dennis Dart purchased new, are currently being operated, although the licence application asks for 15 vehicles. Roger Jarvis, who

founded Blue Bus with partner Alan Turner at the beginning of 1991, said response was encouraging, given the level of competition from the incumbent.

"Rider has dropped its maximum fare to 50p, so we are reasonably encouraged, given they have halved the fares," he said. **CBW**



The battle begins for a full West Yorkshire network



Chester City Transport runs operation...



...Guide Friday provides marketing and guides

■ BUS

Battle of open tops is settled

By Andrew Jarosz

FOUR years of head-to-head competition on Chester's open-top sightseeing tour have come to an end with the agreement of municipally-owned Chester City Transport and nationwide operator Guide Friday of Stratford to pool resources and combine to offer an improved product.

Costs are now shared out, with CCT taking over all operations and Guide Friday providing service marketing and trained guides for the service.

Although the actual peak requirement for the service, which carries over 40,000 passengers per annum, has not reduced, savings will be made during the winter and quieter parts of the summer season.

The new tour requires up to six vehicles, replacing three of each company that

followed each other along the same route connecting places of interest in the city. Fares have increased to last year's GF price of £5 per adult, but are still cheaper than those of other comparable cities.

CCT continues to operate the Liverpool sightseeing tour independently, which is currently in its third year of operation and requires two open toppers.

CCT's traffic manager John Lee said there were considerable economies to be made, especially during the quiet season: "We've operated a city tour for 14 years, the last five with open toppers, and now we can reap the benefits of Guide Friday's undoubtedly very good national marketing," he said.

■ COACH AND BUS

Congrats to winners

CONGRATULATIONS to the 30 winners of the *Coach and Bus Week Privilege Club* prize draw run in association with Gulf Oil (*Coach and Bus Week*, 4 June).

Coach and Bus Week readers were invited to collect two out of three tokens before their free entry went forward for the Grand Prize Draw for 30 Gulf racing jackpots.

The winners are:

- Murray Anderson of Anderson Coach Travel, Ballymoney
- William Marshall of UlsterBus
- David Smith of Crosville Cymru
- MJ Forshaw of Holmeswood Coaches
- Cliff Forsyth of GMPTE
- Graham Harmer of Coastline Buses
- Frank Trotman of K-Valley MiniCoaches, Woking
- Angela Lockwood of Hyltone Coaches, Bucks
- Phil Margrave of London General
- RN Hutchison of Presidential Coachways, Essex
- FJ Martin of Ambassador Coach Travel, Shoburyness
- JM Dell of Rover Bus Service, Chesham
- Malcolm Haskett of Howletts Mazda, Loughborough
- Carl Robert Clews of Clews Coaches, Staffs
- S Pinchen of Jeffs Coaches, Portsmouth
- Chris Noble of Elsey's Coaches, Gosberton
- SN Perkin of Moor Dale Coaches, Newcastle Upon Tyne
- DG Williams of Williams Bros, Llanelli
- G Chambers of M&D Bus Company, Rochester
- TM Walters of Jones Motors (Login) Ltd
- Claire Brack of Allison Transmission
- R Harris of Yorkshire Rider
- DM Phippen of Claverham Coaches/Travel, Bristol
- SJ Davies of Newport Transport Ltd
- Raymond Taylor of Almeida PSV Services
- W Taylor of Wallace Taylor Mini Coach Hire, Gloucestershire
- Peter Turland of West Midlands Travel
- KP Fazakarley of Zak's Coaches, Birmingham
- PL Heard of Heard's Coaches, Bideford
- DA Phillips of Western National

■ COACH AND BUS

Number of PSV operators up by 2.5 per cent, say commissioners

THE number of PSV operators increased by 2.5 per cent last year, according to the traffic commissioners' 1993-4 annual report.

The number of operators registered was 7,193. Applications for new or renewed licences increased by five per cent and applications to vary existing licences went up by two per cent.

Applications to register, vary or cancel local bus ser-

vices decreased by three per cent which, the report says, indicates stability in bus service provision.

The Vehicle Inspectorate said the increase in licences and a decrease in service registration were both in line with previous figures in the past five years.

In its disciplinary role, the traffic commission considered 11,310 cases resulting in the issue of 4,910

warning letters. In five per cent of cases a driving licence was refused, suspended or revoked - an increase of one per cent over the previous year.

Total number of vehicles inspected for traffic offences (principally tachograph and drivers' hours) was 34,634, compared to 40,508 in 1992/93 partly reflecting a switch of VI resources from routine roadside checks to

investigative work. Prosecutions increased from 527 to 705 on the previous year.

The total number of PSVs checked at the roadside or operators' premises for roadworthiness remained at about the same level as 1992/93 at 37,810.

The figure for vehicles issued with prohibitions was nine per cent, an increase of one per cent on the previous year.

■ COACH AND BUS

Norris gets local and urban transport

RESPONSIBILITY for local and urban transport is to be given to Steven Norris following Roger Freeman's departure from the Ministry of Transport.

Mr Norris will keep his responsibility for transport in London as well

as becoming minister for local transport and road safety.

Minister of state for roads is John Watts, taking over from Robert Key, who will be responsible for national roads, infrastructure policy and the

highways agency.

Mr Watts is new to the Department of Transport but has experience of the industry in his previous capacity as a Parliamentary adviser for British Bus.

CBW

■ BUS

First new FlexCis go in service

THE first Scania FlexCi buses to be sold in the UK are going into service with operators in York, Newcastle, Barnsley and Prestwick, fitted with Alexander, Northern Counties, and East Lancs bodywork. Wrights will also body the vehicle.

The Scania L113 CRL FlexCi chassis, first shown in the UK at last October's Coach and Bus show, is being offered as a lower-cost alternative to the N113 vehicle. Cost savings result from

By Richard Simpson

the FlexCi's in-line, inclined rear power module, which, unlike the N113, does not require an angle drive. It is also easier to maintain.

Scania coach and bus marketing manager Nick Leach said the resultant cost savings of between £3,000-£4,000 would make the FlexCi more attractive in the very price-sensitive single-deck bus market, where it is pitched against the Dennis



FlexCi demonstrator has Northern Counties bodywork

Lance and Volvo B10B.

Although not a true ultra-lowfloor bus, the drop-beam steer axle of the MaxCi chassis gives it a low 480mm chassis frame height.

Its modular design 'borrows' the cantilevered front module from the ultra-lowfloor MaxCi, and the

chassis is designed to give a two-step entrance conforming to the latest DPTAC requirement.

Front nearside kneeling suspension is available, reducing boarding height by 120mm.

The body floor is flat until the rear axle.

Driveline is Scania's DSC11-71 engine of 234 bhp (with the 256 bhp DSC11-24 Euro 2 Electronic Diesel Control unit as an option) driving a four-speed ZF 4HP500 with integral retarder. A five-speed 5HP500 is optional.

■ Diary: Page 14

■ BUS

Rider York takes five

BADGERLINE Group member Rider York is putting five Alexander Strider-bodied FlexCis into its fleet. Forming part of Rider York's Flagship programme, the Scania seat 48 and can carry 23 standees.

They have a planned service life of 12 years and will operate on routes linking the Acomb, Foxwood and Beckfield areas of the city with Haxby, Wigginton and the University.

Yorkshire Traction is to take 10 FlexCis with a 50/50 mix of Northern Counties Paladin and East Lancs bodywork. The NC vehicles will work in Rotherham and Doncaster, while the East Lancs versions will operate in Barnsley. The Northern

Counties-bodied FlexCi conforms to DPTAC requirements and seats 52 plus 21 standing passengers.

Busways, now an autonomous part of Stagecoach, is taking four MaxCis; two bodied by Alexander and two by Northern Counties.

They will join over 50 other Scania on the fleet and have a projected life of 15 years on urban and local services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, South Shields and Sunderland.

Long-time Scania operator Dodds of Troon will use a single Alexander-bodied FlexCi on its routes between Ayr and Ardrossan. The vehicle will be based at the company's new base in Prestwick.



Alexander FlexCi for Rider York

■ COACH AND BUS

Scania rejigs coach and bus division

SCANIA (Great Britain) has restructured its coach and bus division to give its customers increased support.

Rather than having to contact separate departments for sales, spares and service, each customer will deal with a single nominated person at Scania's headquarters, although normal links with the local Scania distributor will also be maintained. The accounts will be handled by coach and bus marketing manager Nick Leach, national bus sales manager Peter Crawford and

accounts managers Brian Page and David Warrillow.

Technical support for the account managers will come from Peter Eriksson, who has joined the British company from Sweden. He heads a team including two product support managers and a technical specialist. Their role is to provide back up to operators, distributors and bodybuilders and support the account managers.

The administrative support section remains unchanged under David Booty.

■ COACH AND BUS

Market share is up

SCANIA is obtaining an increased share of a shrinking European market for coaches and buses, according to Scania Buses & Coaches vice president Arne Karlsson.

Mr Karlsson said: "The overall coach and bus market in western Europe has dropped by around 15 per cent in the first six months of 1994, pointing to a total volume of less than 15,000 units.

"Of this shrinking market, Scania has managed to raise its share from five to six per cent. Scania has reinforced its positions in the major market of Great Britain and signifi-

cantly increased market shares in Denmark and Finland. Our projected production volume of 1,450 units in Europe this year therefore seems realistic, indicating a rise of around 25 per cent from 1993.

"The trend in the Far East remains positive and in Australia, Scania is leading with one-third of the market. The big-bus markets in Latin America are slipping, however, and the less encouraging situation there could jeopardise our forecasted total production volume of 3,000 units worldwide for Scania's coaches and buses in 1994." **CBW**

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N 4009



N 4010



N 4011



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N 4024



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N 4020



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ON TOUR EUROPE

It's carry on as normal says the Office of Fair Trading

AN Office of Fair Trading investigation into anti-competitive behaviour in the travel industry has concluded action should not be taken. The inquiry was set up to establish whether the ownership of travel agents by the major tour operators led to restricted trade.

The investigation looked at the use of discriminatory rates of commission, decisions by agents not to carry the brochures of some tour operators, the practice of

By Ian Young

limiting the supply of brochures to agents and late season directional selling by leading firms in the trade.

OFT director general Sir Bryan Carsberg said: "The central issue we needed to address was whether any such practices significantly damaged the ability to compete fairly with independent operators who do not hold shares in travel agencies.

"Bearing in mind the

rather large number of tour operators and travel agents and the evidence of vigorous competition, I do not consider the allegations of anti-competitive behaviour to be sustained.

"Vertical integration (producing tours and owning travel agents) may make it more difficult for newcomers to enter the market, but there is no evidence at the moment that any of the leading operators with agency links have been able to insu-

late themselves from competition."

However, the director general urged operators and agents to make customers aware of their links to help ensure impartial advice.

He expressed concern that the public may not always be aware of the link between a particular tour and the travel agent although Sir Bryan added that he did not believe there was widespread deliberate misleading of the public.

Deals and discounts

■ MANCHESTER-based hotels Beechwood and Rookery Hall have offers on for the rest of the summer. Stay at Beechwood for a night and you get a 25 per cent discount for every subsequent visit. And the luxurious rural Rookery Hall is offering five nights for three if you are staying in the week - and include dinner and breakfast.

Details: Beechwood, tel 061 226 9015; Rookery Hall, tel 0270 610016.

■ MARGATE, Broadstairs and Ramsgate have released a programme of free resort entertainment for the summer holidays. It will include free fireworks displays on Margate beach, free displays at Broadstairs and a new entertainment arena in Margate which features free clown and magic shows in the mornings.

Details from Stephen Payne on 0843 225511.

■ SUSSEX Past, responsible for historic sites in the county, is offering half-price entry to group tours. The properties are Fishbourne Roman Palace, Anne of Cleve's House, Lewes Castle, Michelham Priory, Priest House near East Grinstead and Marlipins Museum in Shoreham. The offer is only open to English Heritage members.

Membership and offers details from English Heritage on 071 973 3400.

ON TOUR EUROPE

P&O joins livestock boycott

P&O EUROPEAN Ferries has joined Brittany Ferries in boycotting the transportation of live animals.

The firm decided acceptable standards of animal welfare were not being maintained on the transportation of livestock to the Continent and will ban the practice at the beginning of October.

It follows a high-profile campaign by welfare groups and politicians (*Coach and Bus Week*, July 2) to halt the practice of exporting farm animals for slaughter.



Queens Moat — looking to the coach market

ON TOUR UK

CTC's 150th member

QUEENS Moat Houses has become the 150th member of the Coach Tourism Council. The hotel group said it decided to join the CTC to give it access to a good range of operators and enable it to do something positive about getting more people to go on holiday by coach.

ON TOUR UK

Viscount Astor gets tourism

VISCOUNT Astor is the new minister responsible for tourism.

He replaces Ian Sproat, who now becomes responsible at the Department of Heritage for sport and deregulation.

Viscount Astor was bought into the heritage department after last month's reshuffle.

He has previously been heritage spokesman in the House of Lords and was appointed to tourism by the new secretary of state, Stephen Dorrel. **CBW**

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WEATHER

City	Average temperature last week	City	Average temperature last week
Paris	24C / 75F	Oslo	20C / 68F
Rome	31C / 89F	Stockholm	22C / 72F
Brussels	22C / 72F	Dublin	15C / 59F
Berlin	24C / 75F	Athens	33C / 91F
Lisbon	24C / 75F	Vienna	28C / 82F
Madrid	27C / 81F	Zurich	25C / 77F

DIESEL PRICES

Country	Diesel price per litre in Sterling £	Country	Diesel price per litre in Sterling £
France	0.46	Norway	0.62
Italy	0.52	Sweden	0.58
Belgium	0.51	Eire	0.53
Germany	0.48	Greece	0.38
Portugal	0.42	Austria	0.46
Spain	0.42	Switzerland	0.61

HOLIDAY POUND

Country	Currency exchange rate	Country	Currency exchange rate
France	8.08 FF/£	Norway	10.42 Nkr / £
Italy	2405 Lire / £	Sweden	11.89 Skr / £
Belgium	48.65 Bfr / £	Eire	0.99 Punt / £
Germany	2.375 DM / £	Greece	360 Drach / £
Portugal	242 Es / £	Austria	16.60 Sch / £
Spain	195 Pta / £	Switzerland	2.00 Sfr / £

COACH AND BUS WEEK GOES ON TOUR — SEE PAGES 23-29

U-turn of attitude needed at the very least

From David Wayman

SIR

It'll take more than a mere amendment to the legislation to curb bus wars (*Coach and Bus Week*, 30 July). Help the smooth operation of buses? Forget about amending. Start talking about repealing. Only a radical re-think, a U-turn of attitude, an unblinkered viewing of transport as an integrated whole will be enough.

They will have to entail a look in depth at what passengers and communities need, what

the environment and the economy need. And when we take the lid off, if we're painfully honest we'll admit that those needs are not being and cannot be met other than perhaps in a superficial and short-term way by the deregulated, competitive bus system we're saddled with at present.

It's too unstable, too fragmented, too expensive. It's wasteful of resources and often unreliable and inconvenient. It has created motivation and priorities inappropriate for so vital a public service that has such profound implications for so many aspects of our society and the well-being

of the people who are part of it.

If we who are transport activists can succeed in striving for some new legislation that addresses such points as these from the roots, even if it means waiting for a change of Government (and this time, it's to be hoped, one that will listen to all the soundest advice and not just to what it wants to hear), then we'll have won a bus war to end all bus wars.

David Wayman

Convener

Oldham Transport Users' Forum

Joint working

From Gerry Nevill

SIR

Regarding the involvement of Eastern National and the joint operation with the former Canvey and Benfleet companies (*Coach and Bus Week*, 18 June).

Operationally independent until absorbed into Eastern National on 1 January 1955., from 1932 to 1951 there was joint working between the Westcliff and Benfleet.

Gerry Nevill
Southend-on-Sea

Include all drivers in proposed legislation

From Anon

SIR

Recommendations by the Confederation of Passenger Transport, ROSPA and coroner Michael Coker highlight what is, in my view, a major problem when minibuses are driven by non-professional drivers. If, as your article suggests (*Coach and Bus Week*, 9 July) only 8,700 out of 100,000 minibuses in use are driven by professional drivers/operators surely the Government would be seen to be

addressing the problem (particularly in light of the recent spate of accidents involving schoolchildren), if it tightened up legislation when such vehicles are operated under Section 19 Small Bus Permits. In the implementation of the Second EC Directive on the Driving Licence it has the perfect 'vehicle' to do just that.

One of the proposals is that 'new' drivers who wish to drive minibuses with 9-16 seats (Category D1) will have to take an additional test, coupled with stiffer medical tests. This revision, however, will

not apply to minibus drivers for voluntary organisations. I understand the Government's reluctance to impose additional burdens on already hard-pressed organisations but, if the safety of those carried is the primary consideration, why not include all drivers in the new requirements?

In the short term only new drivers would be affected and in the longer term a body of professional drivers would emerge in a field where they are badly needed.

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● LETTER OF THE WEEK

Young need encouragement

From Helen Tatlock

SIR

I write in reference to Ron Whittle's letter (*Coach and Bus Week*, 23 July) on re-investing. I too was looking back in time to 1979 when I found some old excursion and tour programmes. I could not believe that the prices were only a few pence per excursion cheaper.

Now considering the rate of inflation, on wages, fuel, parts, tax, insurance etc, how are operators going to invest in the future when they can't pay for today? Isn't it time operators got together to think up some sort of price structuring

which takes into account the setup and size of a company and what prices should be charged?

Operators have to move with the times and think of the future, and start making a profit and not wages. Somebody must have good ideas.

As to your other point of younger people being interested in coming into the industry, you have hit the nail on the head. There are no rewards anymore.

It's just a job and a poorly-paid one at that. I have been in the job for 10 years and have a PCV licence and a CPC. Yet I cannot even get a job as an assistant traffic manager with the intention of learning for the future. Tell me, how does any-

body who wants to start in the industry actually get started? I think it's time operators offered some encouragement to youngsters and trained them before entering them for the appropriate exams.

Alas, I now work for myself as a market trader. I work fewer hours and have a better salary. Yet I would go back to the late nights, early mornings, broken down vehicles, drunken passengers, computer errors and, of course, the excuses from the drivers. But the salaries do not match the hard work.

Helen Tatlock
Bury
Lancs



Write to: The Editor,
Coach and Bus Week,
EMAP Response Publishing
Wentworth House,
Wentworth Street,
Peterborough, PE11DS,
or by fax: 0733 62656

The editor is always pleased to receive letters for publication and will, if requested, publish these anonymously. But please attach your name and address for our information.



London borough has been helpful and supportive

From Malcolm Wren

SIR

Your diary column (*Coach and Bus Week*, 23 July) places an incorrect interpretation on the proposed experimental use of articulated buses on two London Transport contracted services in Romford.

The two routes on which the vehicles will be used are peak-only services which, because they serve several popular educational establishments and busy railway stations, carry substantial loads. The proposal by Capital Citybus to use articulated buses is welcome in that it offers extra capacity on these busy routes and enables experience to be gained in the use of these vehi-

cles in London conditions.

The London Borough of Havering has been both helpful and supportive of the experiment contrary to the impression created by your article.

Malcolm Wren
Development manager
London Transport Buses

profits?

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Why old hack will not be a winner

COACH and Bus Week news and technical editor Richard Simpson was surprised to receive an invitation to enter the Guild of Motoring Writers "Motoring Writer of the Future," competition - not least because he's almost 10 years too old to enter.

The topic which the good old boys in string-back gloves wanted Simpson to expand upon was "The vehicles we will be driving and writing about in 25 years time."

Like every other *Coach and Bus Week* staffer, Simpson hopes that in 25 years time we'll all be riding about in (and writing about) brand new buses as part of an up-to-date public transport system but, taking a more realistic view, it will probably still be the infamous G-registration Rover 216S EMAP pool car. (Let's not forget the tax advantages - ed)

Riddle of the lizard solved

JOURNALISTS at the recent launch of the Scania FlexCi all had one difficult technical question for the importer's staff: "Why is there a picture of a lizard on the side of the bus?"

The answer was that it's not just a lizard, but a chameleon.

"OK, so why is there a picture of a chameleon on the side of the bus?"

It appears that the chameleon's ability to change colours to blend with its background is matched by the ability of the FlexCi design to perform differ-

ent roles.

According to the brochure: "Just as the chameleon adapts itself to its environment, the Scania FlexCi can be rebodied and custom-built to suit the widely varying needs of individual customers."

Here at *Coach and Bus Week*, we reckon it's so the vehicle can be used in Scania's famous series of adverts linking models with song titles. How about "Join the Culture Club with Scania's Karma Chameleon?"

Or, there again, perhaps not...



Does idea have stamp of success?

TIMES are hard in the coach and bus industry, but here at *Coach and Bus Week* we were a little surprised to receive the following from those good folks at the Royal Mail:

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cause those customers tend to go on to buy other stamp-related items such as cards and stationery, and unrelated items such as newspapers, snacks and cigarettes."

"So why not become a stamp retailer and try our sign out for yourself?"

"They don't take up much room, and could boost your sales significantly."

Well, we could always sell stamps mail order...on second thoughts, perhaps we'd better stick to subscriptions and advertising.

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It's back-door regulation — and wrong

WHAT is so special about the bus industry that its every move has to be scrutinised and, if necessary, controlled? What has been done to prevent giant retail outlets from decimating the traditional High Street of small shops (and, perhaps even more damaging to the communities concerned, killing off village shops)?

Has any notice been taken by legislators that the pricing ability (or policy) of these multiples is also beginning to sound the death knell for doorstep delivery of milk and bread and the cessation of petrol sales from hundreds of local forecourts? On a different front, has there been any attempt to curb the proliferation of roadside eating houses, bearing different names, but all under the control of a couple of giants in the hotel and catering industry? The ban on coaches and lorries using these new-style facilities has resulted in a restricted choice for drivers and passengers and, incidentally, been responsible for the growth of disgusting-looking caravan-type noshing shops in muddy laybys.

While I might normally be pleased to see any developments beneficial to the smaller operator, any support I might feel for what is happening at present is counteracted by the feeling that it is a parcel of returns to regulation measures tied up in red tape — a present I most certainly do not want. Stagecoach, which a decade or so ago was only a small company, has recently had to give a clutch of undertakings to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry aimed at controlling any Stagecoach operations in Sussex.

These undertakings include:

- If it reduces fares, or service frequency because of competition it will not increase fares, or decrease frequency of service, for a year after any withdrawal of a competitor from a service;
- If it tenders for a route but does not win the tender it will not then register anything which substantially duplicates the tendered service without the consent of the Director General of Fair Trading;
- It will supply:
 - 1) Hastings Buses financial performance figures at half-yearly intervals to the Director General.
 - 2) Local bus mileage to the county council.
 - 3) Any changes in local bus services and fares together with the percentage of lost mileage to the director general, the council, and the National Federation of Bus Users.
- And, for good measure, if it tenders for any work it must demonstrate, if required, that the price was based on no more than direct costs less revenue; plus no more than 20 per cent of that figure to contribute to overheads and profit.

This is not the first time this sort of device has been employed. I believe a similar Order was made against Maidstone & District earlier in the year and a watered-down version just agreed with the Mainline Group in Sheffield.

Their individual and semi-private nature and the time and cost involved makes me think that the openness, clarity of law, and the availability of sanctions and appeal procedure — the features of licensing applied by the Traffic Commissioners — was probably preferable.

But there is yet another move towards back-door re-regulation: The proposed changes in legislation. The DoT has drafted two regulations, the first of which would allow the commissioner to limit the number of vehicles to be used in the provision of a service when a highway authority satisfies a traffic commissioner that the level of bus traffic constitutes either a danger to road users or creates severe traffic congestion.

But, although this power (and those already arising from S7 of the Transport Act 1985) may well be intended to prevent lots of near empty, and perhaps competing, buses causing mayhem in city centres while jostling for a few passengers

hicles are to be provided, have insufficient capacity to carry all persons wishing to travel on the service unless the additional vehicles were provided."

While I comprehend its aim and do indeed object to duplication being used as a competitor-bashing exercise, I predict that the effect if this becomes law will be to frighten off the small operator from providing

'legitimate' duplication.

Though he will fear he may not be able to prove he has the necessary 'reasonable grounds' and may not be able to demonstrate 'special circumstances' he would be virtually incapable of stopping large operators using duplication as an anti-competitive measure.

Firstly, it is easy for a larger operator to create the reasonable grounds and the special circumstances, for example by withdrawing double deckers and substituting a multiplicity of minibuses to replace them on a route.

Secondly, if 'competitor bashing' is a real and significant problem meriting new legislation (and I question that belief) its principal occurrence is over routes which the dominant operator has simply registered as 'frequent' ie with headway of 10 minutes or less.

On such registrations how can it be determined how many vehicles are necessary to provide the registered service? Without that determination it is impossible to demonstrate that duplicates (whether or not merited by passenger demand) were provided.

But my prime objection to this proposed amendment to the law lies in its attack at the very heart of deregulation as epitomised by the words: "...have insufficient capacity to carry all persons wishing to travel on the service..." It is impossible to know which, of competing, services people may wish to travel on, so one has to presume that 'wish' infers potential passengers. But surely a cornerstone of deregulation was that passengers should have the choice of service on which to travel.

Why, therefore, should there be a presumption in this drafted clause that potential passengers would travel on the service being duplicated? This is a backwards step towards the regulatory concept of proving passenger demand to be permitted to operate a service.

If this well-intended but potentially useless proposal is not to make a mockery of the concept of deregulation, surely duplication should only be permitted if there are reasonable grounds to believe there is insufficient capacity across all services registered over the route to carry all persons wishing to travel over any part of that route.

There can be no assumption in a deregulated environment that the service of any one operator has some sort of 'ownership' of the passengers wishing to travel over the route of that service if there is also a competing service covering all or part of that route. I see no value at all in this clause and would prefer to see it dropped but, if we are to have it, at least get it right.



Stagecoach — small company 10 years ago

between them, in fact there is only a requirement for the commissioner to have regard to the interests of passengers.

Even though every bus was a choc-a-bloc with passengers, the number of vehicles might be reduced if it was deemed their volume caused danger or severe congestion which the highway authority had done nothing to alleviate.

Furthermore, this power to limit the number of vehicles is not restricted to just vicinity, or only at the times, of the congestion and/or danger. The proposed amendment allows for this reduction to apply: "Along all or part of (the service) route whether generally or at particular times."

The second draft regulation relates to duplication and, if approved, will only allow duplication when: "The operator of the service has reasonable grounds to expect that, owing to special circumstances, the number of vehicles required to provide the service in accordance with the registration would, at the time the additional ve-

Mike Morgan puts the EOS 90 through its paces and discovers the secrets behind the outstanding success of this newcomer to the UK coach scene

VAN HOOL has done the trick. At last the promise of the EOS has been fulfilled. Unveiled by Belgian-manufacturer LAG with great ceremony at the NEC over four years ago as a super-high 3.7-metre coach it was hailed as the 'dawn of a new era'. With controversial looks, 370bhp engine, cavernous luggage space, sunken toilet and high seating capacity it offered UK buyers a startling alternative.

By common consent its design was advanced - as were some of its electrical components. But teething troubles and high price allied to the demise of LAG as a coach builder and a depressed market foiled its potential. Van Hool took over the Bree factory and the business became the EOS Coach Manufacturing Company.

At first the changes were subtle - a different badge and some Van Hool interior treatment. Then came the EOS 200 with re-designed front, leaving the original two-screen vehicle as the '100'.

While the '200' looked more like a Van Hool product it was still a 3.7 metre high coach and therefore of limited appeal.

The next stage in the vehicle's develop-

ment was inevitable. But the UK had to wait until October last year for its first glimpse of the additional model. It materialised as the scaled-down EOS 90 based on the '200' style. Height was cut to 3.4 metres and right-hand-drive coaches have strengthened superstructure to meet ECE 66 rollover regulations. Yet, just as significantly, Van Hool had clearly stamped its hallmark on styling and build quality.

The innovation was launched with classic understatement. There was no trumpet fanfare or extravagant claims. Instead the Belgian company allowed the UK market to make its own judgment.

This tactic reflected well on the confidence Van Hool had in its achievement - and it has produced results which contradict the downward trend in new coach sales.

Build

The initial production batch was fitted with MAN D2866 LOH/R engine developing 313bhp (230kW) at 2,000rpm, ZF S6-85 gearbox and in-tarder, ZF rear axle, independent front suspension with disc brakes, 580-litre fuel tank forward of the front wheels, an offside rear floor-mounted toilet and washroom rearwards of the Continental entrance door, and 49/51 passenger seats. Most units have Suttrak integrated air conditioning working on HFK 134a refrigerant and with a K115 condenser behind the rear axle leaving nine cubic metres of the underfloor luggage capacity in the wheelbase, accessible through two paralift doors at both sides.



Height has been reduced to 3.4 metres

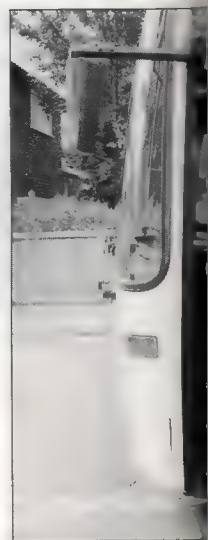
EOS h high



Front is styled after EOS 200

Cronin's of Cork took the first as part of an order of four EOS 90 and one EOS 200. Together with a Van Hool T815 Alizee HE, these coaches are used on incoming tours in Ireland. Another early batch were four certified to Tempo 100 for Crusader Holidays of Clacton-on-Sea for its Continental tour programme. They have 48 seats for extra legroom, Webasto preheater, hot and cold drinks facilities and central locking.

EOS vehicles are supplied by Van Hool's former-LAG Wellingborough-based dealership or, as with the '90' for this *Coach and Bus Week* test, Cleckheaton-based Hughes DAF - the Cowie Group subsidiary which holds the UK DAF Bus franchise. Hughes DAF sells '90s' after spotting marketing potential for this MAN-powered integral in ad-



Doorway



metres on the EOS 90 version

its the notes



height is low

dition to Van Hool-bodied DAF Bus underframes.

Specification on the test coach was very similar to those initial vehicles, but without air conditioning. Sales manager Jim Martin said eight of the 15 '90s' Hughes DAF had put on the road since January had air conditioning. The company expects a steady flow of vehicles at a similar rate into next year. Around 50 per cent will have air-con and the first with centre sunken toilet are now available.

First vehicles had saloon toilets, because, according to Mr Martin, new coach buyers expressed a prefer-

ence over the past two years. He said: "There is a benefit to luggage space."

Packaging is one of the EOS family's key virtues, making the design an object lesson

for other manufacturers looking to make optimum use of the standard 12 metre by 2.5 metre box. But the EOS solution is not without its downside.

The entrance is legendary as a consequence of the narrow, steep and multi-step entrance to the saloon on the '100/200'. This arrangement is unsuited to the majority of traditional coach passengers, but less of a problem on the lower-build '90'.

First-time drivers need to exercise caution when positioning any EOS on the road. As part of the space utilisation theme the low-driver cab is tucked further into the offside front corner than normal. Unless drivers are aware of the consequences it is easy to get too close to near-side objects and tyre scrub or body damage could be a problem.

However, the '90' has sufficient points in its favour to reduce these disadvantages to minor irritations. Its construction gives a worthwhile weight saving which puts a 49-seat double-glazed coach with air-conditioning on the right

side of the 17 tonne GVW limit.

Steel tube frames are assembled and welded in jigs. One-piece stretched chromated-galvanized steel side panels are fitted from windows to floor-line. Front and rear styling panels are GRP and the one-piece roof is aluminium. The coach has lift-up wheelarch panels and anti-corrosion treatment is applied during production.

Passenger impressions

The three-step 800mm wide entrance can be raised or lowered by 90mm from the normal ride height of 370mm. Beware the low door height. Steps are shallow but the two steeper steps from the entrance area to the sunken centre gangway are less intimidating than on the '100/200'.

Once your passengers have made it this far they will have encountered the feel of a quality machine. There is nothing flashy or trendy about the passenger environment - more conservative and competent. Yet for general coaching needs this formula fits the bill perfectly.

Van Hool's reclining Labellux seats are well respected. They look right and feel right with legroom adequate on the nearside - better on the offside. Those on the test coach have magazine nets, ashtray, adjustable footrest, fixed armrest against the side wall and drop-down armrest on the aisle seats. Inertia reel lap seatbelts comply with regulations and Mr Martin says for next season all seats will have factory-fitted belts.

Ventilation hatches are more substantial than the light-weight plastic design on Van Hool's own Alizee and the heating controls on the centre console are excellent.

The manufacturer says it has given attention to thermal and noise insulation. All windows are Sundim tinted glazing while a one-piece laminated windscreen is fitted. Double glazing even extends to the windows in the front plug door and the driver's side window giving protection against condensation and a worthwhile contribution to a quiet ride.

Driver impressions

An EOS 90 shares much in common with the '100/200'. It uses the same underframe, but its different dimensions visibly affect floor height, entrance step layout, underfloor luggage capacity, and, in particular, the front design. And beneath the skin are some changes which are significant to the driver.

Whereas the '100/200' is a true big brother with 370bhp MAN power driving through ZF's eight-speed 8S-180 gearbox, our '90' has less stimulating 313bhp coupled to the popular ZF S6-85 'box with more modest selection of six forward ratios.

But for this size of coach the 'smaller' engine offers more than its fair share of torque. Specification data can appear fairly hypothetical when you are behind the wheel. However, in the case of this MAN power-



Power is down to 313bhp

→ house the reality is that it pulls like a train from 1,100rpm through the green band up to peak power at 2,000rpm. In top gear this gives you healthy acceleration from just below 50mph up to the legal maximum. Fifth comes into its own from 35-50mph, but there is a dilemma around 30mph where third runs out of steam, fourth pulls well, and fifth gear gives lethargic acceleration.

Van Hool's refined EOS concept produces an efficient cab environment. The good points are the way the controls fall to hand and the neat, reflection-free instrument panel.

The bad points are: An indistinct indicator warning light; handbrake tucked away and too far back on the driver's left on a control console which incorporates controls for door, heat and air-con (where fitted). And the gearchange was very heavy - particularly selection of first and second. However, the change is conveniently positioned close to the driver's excellent fully adjustable seat with headrest, restraint and armrests.

Throughout the test the '90' was a delightful drive. Power was available when required - 0-30mph in 10 secs is among the best - and a superbly efficient ZF Intarder a very useful part of the package. This hydraulic retarder restrained the coach without effort with the added bonus of a button to hold speeds on descents. However, a rapid halt with the Intarder switched out required very firm footbrake pressure.

Forward visibility is very good. The electric mirrors are ideal in location, size and ease of adjustment. Despite their large size no dangerous blind spot occurs - unlike problems noted when these mirrors are fitted on an Alizee. A nearside pavement mirror is a worthy safety feature.



Seats are Van Hool's own

Performance

How does the '90' stand up on the *Coach and Bus Week* test route?

Our northern circuit is split into three 80 mile sections. We face up to the rigours of non-stop motorway running, match the vehicle against the challenge of Garrowby Hill and the indifferent terrain on the Yorkshire Wolds, confront heavy urban traffic and a tortuous route through Malton before heading for Harrogate and Leeds. It brings out the strengths - and weaknesses - of the vehicle. What is more we generate a fuel economy figure which operators can expect from the same vehicle. On test the '90' returned a commendable 12.6 mpg - operators are claiming similar.

Motorway cruising is a pleasure with a steady tacho trace up hill and down dale. Throughout our circuit of the Yorkshire motorway network average speed was 61mph despite 65mph limiter and some very heavy traffic, though expedient third lane running was required to avoid being baulked by heavy haulage on the long M1 drag south of

Sheffield. When leaving Leeds on the return to Cleckheaton the '90' took to the M601 incline with relish. It appeared to ignore the confrontation and romped up to 65mph.

Hills on the Yorkshire Wolds included a one-in-six challenge where you can expect to drop down to third gear in many coaches as speed falls to around 20mph - second is called for with some of the low-powered options. Yet the '90' charged up in fourth with the rev counter steady at 1,200rpm and the engine performing at its peak.

This very impressive performance was achieved while the unladen coach had less than 1,500km behind it. Once run-in better flexibility and free running with improved economy can be expected.

Verdict

Evolution of the EOS has refined it into a competitive package which offers economy and power while making air-con plus double-glazing a realistic option with maximum seating.

Although the EOS shape is retained, detail styling changes present a smoother profile. Gone are the excessively heavy front end features, and a neat lower front-end panel incorporates small twin-headlights and delicate grill-like highlights. It spells attention to detail - a theme that continues along the sides and round the back where the chamfered corners give shape to the optional windowless rear.

Operators who have taken to the '90' have been quick to sing its praises.

The new era has at last dawned and Van Hool should be congratulated for responding in such fine style. This is the coach the EOS always threatened to be - an advanced, stylish, refined, quality integral.

SPECIFICATION

Vehicle:	EOS 90
Body:	51 seats plus rear demountable toilet
Price:	from £155,000
Engine:	MAN D2866 LOH/R (09) six cylinder - turbocharged and intercooled
Power:	313bhp (230 kW) @ 2,000 rpm
Torque:	944 Lbf ft (1,250 Nm) @ 1,200 rpm
Gearbox:	ZF S6-85 six-speed manual
Clutch:	Single plate - air assisted hydraulic operation
Brakes:	Front: discs Rear: S-cam drums Handbrake: spring release
Retarder:	ZF hydraulic Intarder - operated by foot and/or stalk
Steering:	ZF 8043 hydraulic power assisted - pneumatic column adjustment for height and rake
Suspension:	Full air system with raise and front kneel

Front axle:	Independent
Drive axle:	ZF A-131 S9.1 - ratio 2.93:1
Tyres:	295/80R 22



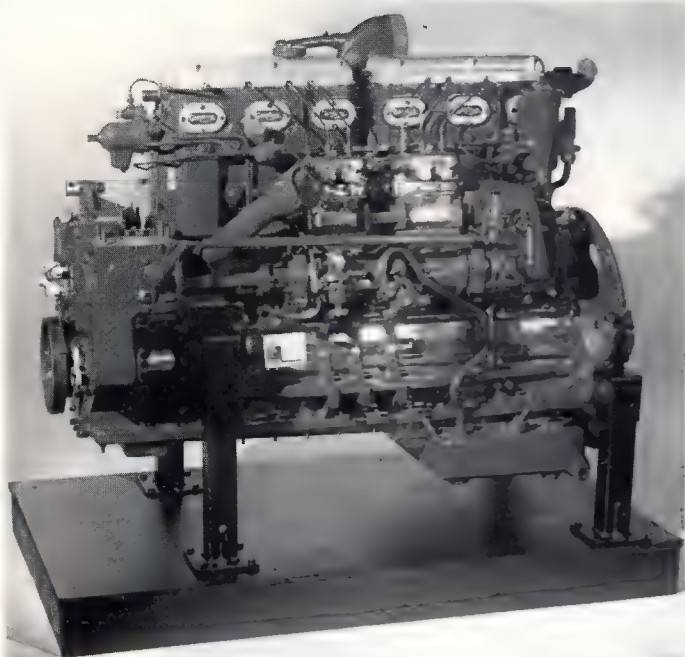
Efficient cab environment

DIMENSIONS

Length:	12 metres
Width:	2.5 metres
Height:	3.49 metres
Wheelbase:	5.8 metres
Front overhang:	2.69 metres
Rear overhang:	3.49 metres
Unladen weight:	12,040kg (12,600kg with 49 seats and air con)
GVW:	17,000kg

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration:	0-30 mph - 10 secs 0-50 mph - 22 secs 50-70 mph in top gear - 23 secs
Fuel economy:	Average consumption - 12.6 mpg
Total distance:	247 miles
Fuel used:	19.6 gallons
Range (580 litre tank):	1,600 miles
Noise levels at 65 mph:	Front - 71 dB(A)



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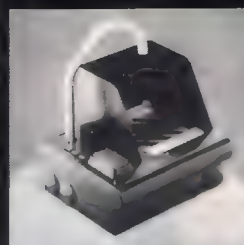
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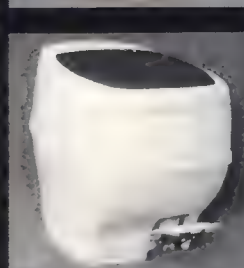
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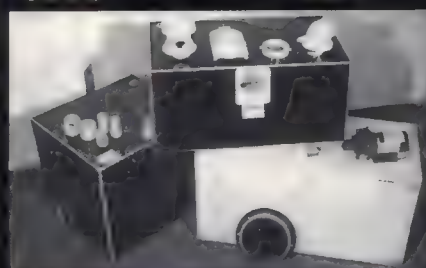
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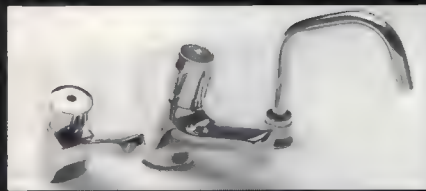
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COACH AND BUS

ON TOUR

■ TALKBACK

IF our experience is anything to go by there has been a significant growth in business booked through tour wholesalers. So far this year ICT has seen a 40 per cent increase on 1993. Paris Amsterdam and Ireland are the firm favourites, but we have promoted off-season business and have made concerted efforts to push Euro Disneyland.

During February this year, in conjunction with *Coach and Bus Week*, we held the first ever Euro Disneyland conference in Paris which was attended by 150 coach operators.

We achieved what we said wanted to be done - to show coach operators that Euro Disneyland has changed its attitude towards the coach industry. It not only wants our business but needs it.

Too many coach operators spend thousands of pounds placing adverts in their local paper and think that is all they have to do to sell their coach tours.

This works for some operators with very little competition in their area but mostly it does not. Operators must make the most of every opportunity that comes their way, even if it is a bit of an unusual idea.

They must be open to new ideas, new methods of selling and marketing their products. Times are changing - and so is the industry.

Coach operators must work closely with switched-on organisations that want them to succeed. The Coach Tourism Council, of which ICT is an active member, is the perfect tool to assist operators develop their business. The more astute operator is well advised to become a member of the CTC.

Although UK and Irish programmes can be expanded, there are many areas available for the operator to exploit. These include: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Northern Spain and Portugal.

The main problems this year have been low passenger figures and a high level of cancellations.

Nevertheless, we remain confident for the remainder of the year and are looking to see a great improvement in the market for 1995.

Stephen Moore

● **Stephen Moore** is sales and marketing director of ICT

■ THIS WEEK



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Ian Young explores the new destinations geared to bringing operators more business



ON TOUR WITH LOWLAND

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Alan Millar finds there is a welcome for coach tour passengers in the Scottish Borders

■ NEXT WEEK

On Tour's regular coach tourism feature looks at trends and group deals in the hotel and accommodation market.

● For Talkback, just post or fax around 300 words to: **Mike Morgan**, Editor, *Coach and Bus Week*, Wentworth House, Wentworth Street, Peterborough PE1 1DS. Tel: 0733 63100. Fax: 0733 62656.

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Cautious optimism on the group tour front

New destinations await operators planning tours for next year. Ian Young examines the trends

WILLINGNESS to try out new destinations and an upturn in confidence are features of the group tour wholesale market this season.

Some wholesalers report an increase in bookings for next year although many operators remain cautious in case they overbook.

Kent-based Albatross Tours director Sally Thelen said: "Bookings have been looking better this year although there seems to be a trend towards lower numbers. Things are looking good for next year and customers are responding well to new destinations."

This was echoed by Hereford-based Norman Allen Group Travel, which described last year as terrible.

Norman Allen marketing manager Tony Rollinson said: "This has been a consolidation year and 1995 is looking very good. We are attracting the more discerning traveller looking for something a bit different."

Northern Spain has become a best seller particularly with the increasing popularity of P&O European's Portsmouth-Bilbao Line.

The twice weekly Pride of Bilbao sailing allows an overnight rest for

drivers and passengers before docking on the doorstep of northern Spain and Portugal.

P&O has seen demand increase on the route since it opened in April last year.

Compared with its southern resorts the northern part of Spain seems largely untouched.

Norway and Sweden have attracted more attention as affordable destinations.

Mr Rollinson said: "We have seen a lot more activity in the Scandinavian countries which have just gone through recession and are looking closer to the EU."

This has resulted in more competitive prices in these traditionally high living standard countries. One wholesaler said you can now buy a glass of beer in Sweden

for as little as £2.

The Continental recession has worked to the benefit of some tour operators, who have taken advantage of cheap hotel offers around.

Cheshire-based Greatday's sales director Paul Beaumont said: "There has been a glut of accommodation and hotel prices which have never been better for the customers. Four-star accommodation has become particularly cheap with a lot of bargains to be picked up in Austria, Germany and France."

The recession has resulted in overcapacity in accommodation, much of it built in the boom years of the eighties.

Mr Beaumont added that Germany has some of the cheapest accommodation and the usually ex-

pensive Austria has become more competitive in price.

Greatdays has been organising new group tours in Sardinia and Corsica.

The 13-day tour will use the Marseille to Corsica ferry to transport vehicles on to the islands.

Ironically, owners of accommodation in Eastern Europe have received complaints about overcharging, as they endeavour to match the West's standards of service and choice.

The growing popularity of such places as Budapest and Prague has led to problems in keeping up with demand for more hotels. This has seen some hoteliers try to treble prices to western tour firms.

The East is still attracting a great deal of interest with many untapped destinations opening up. Grantham-based Eurofix, which started group packages be-

fore the demise of the Iron Curtain, has announced details of a new route from Newcastle to Wismar in east Germany, later this year.

The route will take customers straight into the heart of the East, which will help open up new routes to the former Soviet states.

Groupways Leisure managing director Gerry Topiol said he didn't find



Norway: Attracting more interest

ON TOUR AND WHOLESALERS

any clear trend emerging but believed customers were more sophisticated in their choices.

Mr Topiol said: "Consumers are requiring products that are new, different and innovative. I think operators are responding to this, which they were not a few years ago."

He added that short to medium-sized breaks had been very popular with a lot of interest in off-peak winter holidays such as Tuscany and Cannes.

Although consumer confidence is slowly recovering, the wholesale industry is no different to any other in expressing only cautious optimism.

Gerry Topiol added: "I think the economy is slowly improving and confidence is slowly returning. There is a danger that operators, because of the mixed pattern, will continue to plan tours based on the current situation."

The choice of destinations offered by wholesalers has never been greater and new



Vienna: Still a firm favourite

inclusive services, such as an insurance bond protection in packages, are becoming a regular feature.

Some smaller operators still offer their own tour programme or decide to mix them with wholesalers' packages.

Suffolk-based BR Shreeve formed its own package company, Lazy Days Holidays, five years ago and has just been highly recommended in the Customer First Awards.

The company does mainly UK-based holidays to locally-based customers and has built up a high reputation for personal service such as door-to-door pick ups.

Lazy Days tour manager David Dickinson said: "Because we have a small catchment area and know most of our clients we organise our own tours."

The company was up against large companies such as ICI for the service award, but the judges were particularly impressed by the family atmosphere this small coach tour operation was able to build.

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ALBATROSS TOURS - THE WAY FORWARD

Next year Albatross Tours are celebrating 10 years of service to the travel trade.

Looking back over the years to the humble start and year one, photocopied sheets were used as sales material and clients were very few indeed. However, these clients supporting Albatross from day one are still there and over the years Albatross has managed to build an impressive portfolio of clients all over Britain. So what's the secret of success? Sally Thelen, Director, says "Our personal approach and reputation as a friendly company has much to do with it, we like to see our clients as friends and as such, running successful tours is very important to us.

We like to get to know our clients' business, find out what market segment they are after and accordingly what type of hotels they want. We believe that only when we know that, and that's not achieved instantly, can we book the right hotels and services for them."

Albatross is also one of the few real wholesale agents. They do not deal direct with private parties, they do not run readers offers or radio advertised tours and, they do not operate coaches or sell insurance either.

They believe that every coach handled by a wholesaler is business taken away from a coach operator, even if wholesalers might want to argue that they give coach companies business.

Next week, Albatross is launching its summer brochures, featuring the whole of Europe and the UK. It's the

largest collection of tours and ideas ever and, arguably the largest wholesale programme available. Besides the two brochures with a total of 76 pages and hundreds of ready made tours and modules, there are an equal amount of hotels and tours which are not featured but nevertheless available to operators.

All of them are competitively priced and generally are based on using either good 3 star or 4 star category hotels. "We have never really gone for gimmicks or cheap offers" says Manfred Thelen. "Our aim is to provide quality touring arrangements for an increasingly demanding clientele and offer a value for money product to our clients. It is sometimes difficult to find the right 'deals' but in a large number of resorts we can contract bulk business and we do pass these savings on our clients. We have never exploited the market, if we buy cheap-we sell cheap. Our mark-up remains the same and has done since we started."

Although quality touring arrangements and prices are of prime importance, the back-up and service is equally important to many operators.

Albatross Tours have invested heavily in a tailor made computer reservation system, which helps to keep administration up to date and produces relevant and to the point paperwork for operators. At the same time it allows us to keep suppliers informed which helps to reduce problems with over-bookings.

Once on tour, there is a back-up service just a telephone call away, not only by telephoning England but by contacting the Albatross office in Salzburg and later this year, their new office in Frankfurt.

Over the years, many operators have used this service, mainly when their drivers need cash or assistance to help them out of a problematic situation.

So what is the way forward? Caron Sotgiu, Sales Manager at Albatross Tours says "Even more innovative packages to exciting destinations are called for, thus tempting an increasingly selective customer. In addition, since Europe is not getting any larger, we are now offering inclusive coach tours together with flight arrangements. As an example there is a superb Western Canada tour featured in our Summer 1995 brochure. It will service a market that otherwise would book with an air-tour operator. By featuring tours of this nature in a coaching brochure, operators can retain their clients even if they want to venture a little further away than Europe."

Albatross Tours is a growing company and has lots of new ideas and plans for the future.

Asking Manfred Thelen what these are, he says, "Now that would be telling..."

**Albatross Tours
can be contacted
on 0622 790700.**

Alan Millar travels to the sparsely populated Scottish Borders to find out how Lowland Omnibus makes a success out of coaching



AS a destination, the woollen mills, ruined abbeys and rolling hills of the Scottish Borders make ideal coaching country, but as a catchment area for coach holidays these are far from easy pickings.

The Borders stretch across 1,800 square miles, yet only 100,000 people live there. That's about the same population as lives in York or Cambridge. Hawick, the largest town, has 18,000 inhabitants, as do the adjacent towns of Galashiels and Melrose, but beyond that we're talking about a few towns with populations smaller than some English villages and dozens of hamlets and isolated farms.

To reach these, a tour operator needs to advertise in the half dozen largely unconnected local newspapers which circulate in different parts of the Borders, for this is an area in which small communities cling on to their independent identities, and it has to be able to arrange reasonably local pick-ups along a network of none-too-fast single carriageway roads.

Yet this is the market which Lowland Omnibuses is trying to develop. The first leg of the Scottish Bus Group to be privatised in 1990, Lowland is now owned by its managers and employees and as well as being the

main local bus operator in the Borders and the more populous adjoining parts of East Lothian, it has been developing its coaching business.

Much of that growth has come from the acquisition of Ian Glass of Haddington, a long established East Lothian coach and bus operator, and from contracts with incoming tours groups, but business development manager Graham Simpkins has been steadily developing a tour programme since he joined Lowland from York Pullman in January 1992.

From an initial 13-tour programme, the offering of tours has grown to 27 for 1994, actually two fewer than last year but with a stronger chance of fewer cancellations this year as Lowland comes to terms with the likes and dislikes of its local market.

It has adopted a realistic approach, recognising that it can of-

Lowland get with its local

fer more local pick-ups than the market leaders in Scotland who expect most Borders customers to travel into Edinburgh to join a tour, but Lowland has a very modest promotion budget for the tours. This is the first year it has published photographs in its brochure, and these are in black and white, and it doesn't mail them out unless requested.

"We publish a leaflet with a one-line description and price of a holiday and then ask people to request a brochure," says Mr Simpkins. "If we sent out 1,000 brochures, we wouldn't get 1,000 bookings, but we tell them by leaflet that we are still here." Advertisements in its buses and offices reinforce the message.

Pick-ups are arranged in all 12 towns where Lowland has an office. Most other passengers can either be picked up along the line of route, in some cases at road ends to villages or farms, and free travel is provided on Lowland's scheduled buses to link in with coach pick-ups.

Most tours, in fact, start in Edinburgh where Lowland is slowly building up a larger customer base, but the company has spent very little of its £10,000 promotion budget there. "We did put a couple of advertisements in the newspapers there to generate business," says Mr Simpkins, "and we did a maildrop into selected areas where retired people live in the city, but we're better spending our advertising budget in Berwick, East Lothian and the Borders. We would rather rely on building up a customer base in Edinburgh by recommendation, rather than by spending a fortune."

The tour programme and quality of coaches and hotels all reflect the clientele which Lowland is pursuing. The Borders have a high proportion of affluent retired people living there, many of whom have sold up their city homes, and although Lowland also does a brisk trade in running tours to France and Ireland for the region's many rugby supporters, most of its tours customers are 45 or older.

Its coaches are of the same standard as those used for incoming tours - double-glazed with toilets and reclining seats - and the hotels are usually three-star or better. "Our prices are probably a fraction higher than most operators', but when you compare the products in more detail, I'd say ours is probably cheaper," says Mr Simpkins. "I won't charge any extras. Some hotels will charge other tour oper-



Quality of coaches reflects Lowland's target clientele

LOWLAND

s to grips l market

ators' customers £4 extra for a steak. All admission charges are included, so there is no need for our customers to put their hand in their pocket except to buy a cup of tea."

He has also negotiated deals with many hotels for the removal of single room supplements. "It is easy to get single rooms without supplements, but it just depends how bolshie and argumentative you are prepared to be," he says. One of the Ian Glass coaches has been adapted to accommodate wheelchairs and the walking disabled; several of the tour hotels have facilities for disabled people.

Lowland costs its tours so they are in profit with 25 customers. While experience has taught Mr

Simpkins that he can sell New Year holiday breaks and summer breaks in Plymouth, Llan-dudno, Newquay, Bournemouth or Herriot Country without much difficulty, he says Brighton - "a resort that seems to have lost its appeal" - is a hard sell that doesn't reward the effort. And currency fluctuations and distance have prompted him to drop most Continental holidays from the 1994 brochure.

"We're concentrating on the UK because people can fly to some of the Continental places far quicker than if they went by coach. Coach holidays are quite

expensive, but they offer a high level of service and that is why people who want everything to be done for them will buy the packages we offer," he says.

And the service ethos lies behind Lowland's investment in the Welcome Host training programme operated by the Scottish and Welsh Tourist Boards. All of the company's employees, whether working on the holiday

programme, incoming tourist coaches or on local buses, is trained to be helpful to visitors to the area. It reduces the chances of bus passengers being put off booking a holiday with Lowland. "Coach drivers go through it so they know how to deal with hotels. We put them into situations which they have to get out of, like turning up and finding that the hotel rooms aren't yet ready."



An Ian Glass coach has been adapted to carry wheelchairs

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Transol off road - MBC1 reprieved

**YOUR WEEKLY REPORT ON
LAW AND THE
COACH AND BUS
OPERATOR**



MIBBO Singh Thandi's Transol Ltd and his nephew's MBC1 Ltd were put off the road by West Midlands traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh.

But MBC1 has a stay of revocation pending appeal to the Transport Tribunal.

Disciplinary proceedings involving both companies were adjourned in July after allegations they failed to pay insurance premiums (*Coach and Bus Week*, 23 July).

When the hearing was resumed, Mibbo Thandi said Transol was trying to get insurance but Robin Huckall, a director of Robin Huckall & Co, insurance brokers, was trying to block them.

Mr Huckall had asked for one year's premium on 10 to 15 vehicles when he was only prepared to give them three months cover. If Mr Huckall corrected his invoice, he would be paid in cash.

Denying Transol's vehicles had been repossessed, Mr Thandi said they would be coming back that day. Mr Huckall had acted incorrectly in issuing proceedings. They had never denied owing Mr Huckall money. He had never said he would not pay Mr Huckall. Transol had raised capital by selling vehicles to pay Mr Huckall, who had acted hostilely in getting the vehicles seized.

The commissioner said the police claimed Mr Thandi had made serious threats against Mr Huckall, but Mr Thandi denied that was so. He said the company's livelihood was at stake and people had got upset. Someone else from

The commissioner said the police claimed Mr Thandi had made serious threats against Mr Huckall, but Mr Thandi denied that was so

the family might have spoken to Mr Huckall.

Mr Pugh said Mr Huckall had made a statement in which he said that, in January, he had received a telephone call from a Mr Thandi purporting to trade as ST Buses from Rowley Regis.

He said he was starting opera-

By Michael Jewell

tion with 10 Leyland Nationals and two coaches, and they provided an insurance quotation of £28,500 which was accepted.

It was made clear that the basis of payment would be via a recognised finance company. A meeting followed at which he was handed a cheque for £2,952.60.

At that meeting he was introduced to Mibbo Thandi, who said General Accident had indicated it would not be renewing the insurance for his bus fleet. He advised him that Transol was only operating three vehicles, and a quotation of £9,666 was obtained from Summit Motor Policies at Lloyds to insure

years' audited accounts.

Mr Thandi referred him to a firm of accountants, who provided figures but advised that no audited accounts had been filed at Companies House.

● On 24 February Mr Thandi instructed them to add two further vehicles hired in from MBC1 Ltd. At the same time he was asked to ring Aji Thandi with a view to dealing with the insurance of his bus fleet.

● On 10 March Mibbo Thandi asked that a Mercedes coach be added to the schedule and on 31 March a Leyland National.

● On 5 April a Leyland Fleetline was added and three more service buses hired in from MBC1.

● On 6 May they requested a further

with a cheque for £2,000 which was dishonoured by his bank.

As a result, they advised him that they were withdrawing their mandate as brokers for Transol. That decision was not altered even though the cheque subsequently cleared on re-presentation. Meanwhile, they had been advised by General Accident that the policy in the name of MBC1 had been cancelled in February by reason of non-payment of premium. Mr Thandi agreed the facts of that statement were correct.

The commissioner said that, as he understood it, there was no effective insurance on the vehicles but Mr Thandi replied that, because of the difficulties with Mr Huckall, it

had been difficult to get insurance in the name of Transol. He was sure they would get insurance when the debt was cleared.

Mr Pugh said Summit had stated the only cover was for vehicles owned by Transol, yet the schedule included vehicles belonging to MBC1 and ST Buses. Summit sent a letter to Transol after the last public inquiry, advising all cover would cease with effect from seven days after the date of the letter.

Mr Thandi said the problem with Summit came about because Mr Huckall was not very co-operative over the last few months. Denying that the total indebtedness was £48,000. Mr Thandi said

he had paid Mr Huckall various amounts.

The direct debit system could not cope with the additional vehicles and he was suddenly faced with having to find a large sum in cash.

Mr Thandi said the problem with Summit came about because Mr Huckall was not very co-operative over the last few months

Some of the vehicles on the schedule had been off the road for a considerable time, and all that was supposed to have been taken into account when the premium was calculated. Mr Pugh said Mr Huckall was not at the hearing because he was frightened that Mr Thandi was going to attack him, but Mr Thandi said



Policy in name of MBC1 had been cancelled

those vehicles.

Mr Thandi completed a proposal form and a premium instalment application for Premium Credit and gave him a cheque for £1,036.20 signed by his wife, the company secretary, Mrs A Kaur.

He was told by Mr Thandi that the vehicles operated by ST Buses were also the property of Transol but that they were registered to his nephew for the time being as "a matter of convenience".

On 9 February the deposit cheque for ST Buses had been dishonoured. Mibbo Thandi instructed him to transfer the vehicles to the policy in the name of Transol.

Premium Credit was approached for extension of the credit facility, the additional premium being estimated at £25,000. They made the usual request for the past two

remittance of £5,000 advising that a failure to pay would leave them no alternative but to withdraw cover.

● On 11 May they wrote to Mr Thandi, advising a premium of £28,756 had been agreed for the former ST Buses vehicles, and asking that the deposit be increased to £7,500.

● On 16 May Premium Credit advised that, as no accounts had been filed or supplied, they would not provide further finance.

Mr Thandi was immediately advised of the position and he said he would attend their offices with cash or a banker's draft for £5,000. In fact, he attended with £3,000 only.

He was advised a further 14 days cover had been arranged which would be the extent of the underwriter's liability pending receipt of further and substantial funds. Mr Thandi then called at their offices

Transol off road - MBC1 reprieved

that was not true. Mr Huckall was frightened to attend because he knew he had done things wrong.

Mr Pugh said he had a letter from West Midlands Travel saying Transol had been a member of the Busmaster season ticket scheme from early 1992.

In September 1993 their membership was terminated as they had operated less than 50 per cent of their registered mileage.

Transol was overpaid by £16,707.75 and was invoiced for that amount. Mr Thandi had acknowledged the debt was owed and Transol had asked for re-admission into the scheme. It was decided Transol should not be re-admitted until the money had been paid and had operated properly for six months.

Mr Thandi said the Busmasters scheme was paid on the basis of the mileage operated. He was told they wanted the registered mileage and not the actual mileage.

In that year they had problems with vehicles being vandalised. It had been a misunderstanding and

if the money was owed it would be paid. Action was taken against Transol to take them off the scheme unilaterally without any consultation. Transol had continued to carry people with Busmaster tickets and should be credited with that.

It was agreed at a subsequent meeting they could pay the debt by instalments and that the company be re-admitted to the scheme but they had heard nothing further.

Mr Thandi said they operated successfully until the authorisation was increased to 30 vehicles. He was told by an ex-vehicle examiner that Transol was 'being noticed', it being asked how they had done so well so quickly

Asked what had gone wrong after the company appeared to have been put on the right lines, Mr Thandi said they operated successfully until the authorisation was increased to 30 vehicles.

He was told by an ex-vehicle examiner that Transol was "being noticed", it being asked how they had done so well so quickly. "Since

that date they had attracted severe and punishable attention," he said.

He had done as much as he possibly could, said Mr Thandi. He had put a lot of effort into the company. Maybe he had tried to expand too quickly. Maybe he had the wrong fitters. He would like to clear the company's indebtedness, change the vehicles and operate a small fleet. He needed a bit of luck. He was asking for one last

insurance situation was "very dodgy", to say the least.

He had been greatly concerned that the company might have been operating uninsured vehicles. There was also a separate issue concerning fuel duty rebate.

Transol had taken advantage of the Busmaster scheme. He had also to look very carefully at the maintenance situation.

He had been given assurances galore which had not been kept. Serious prohibitions had been collected and the only saving grace was there had not been a serious accident. He would need to be satisfied about maintenance, said Mr Pugh. When the company asked for the suspension to be lifted, if at that time the vehicles were insured, Transol had paid back the money owed to Busmasters and in respect of fuel duty rebate grant, and there were no other debts, he would not revoke the licence.



Insurance situation 'cloudy to say the least'

AJMAR Singh Thandi, a director of MBC1, said his company had full insurance cover for its vehicles with Summit. It had been paid for in advance and the vehicles were up and running. He did not agree with what Mr Huckall had said.

The vehicles were hired out to Transol and it was up to them to get them insured. Mr Huckall was well aware of that. He had no connection with Mr Huckall whatsoever.

His company was in a similar position to Transol over a debt to Busmasters. He was told the same thing — that they wanted registered mileage and no actual mileage operated. When MBC1 was taken off the scheme, it had still operated it and had not been reimbursed for accepting Busmasters tickets.

It was agreed they could repay in instalments but they had heard nothing since. He said it was correct that the list of vehicles given to Summit by Transol included vehicles belonging to MBC1.

Mr Pugh said the letter from Summit clearly stated that, if the vehicles were owned by someone else, they were not on cover. Questioned by the commissioner, Ajmar Thandi said there was no written hiring agreement. He denied he had really been running his company in conjunction with Transol.

Asked why the licence should not be revoked, Ajmar Thandi said it was the first public inquiry they had been to. When he found out the vehicles were not covered, he insured them, paying in advance. Last week Mr Huckall had repossessed vehicles and he had repossessed the wrong vehicles.

Questioned further Ajmar Thandi said they did not owe any money for past insurance. Three to four vehicles had been hired to Transol. As MBC1 had no insurance, he gave his uncle his vehicles to run on his cover and to maintain MBC1's services.

Mibbo Thandi said it was not right that the two fleets were run together. What happened was that General Accident went out of the market for coach and bus insurance. Renewal was withdrawn and he was prepared to hire the MBC1 vehicles as long as he took the revenue from their services. Mr Huckall was well aware he was hiring the vehicles. He agreed he had asked Mr Huckall to telephone his nephew as he was looking for cover.

Ajmar Thandi agreed they owed money to Busmasters but said they were in dispute. They did not owe anyone else money. The two businesses were completely separate. After the commissioner had pointed out prohibitions had been issued to two vehicles in March, Ajmar Thandi said one of the vehicles had been

sold to Walsall Travel. MBC1 had the prohibition as they had left the licence disc in the window. The other vehicle had a new engine in. There were problems as it was throwing out black smoke and the suppliers had been asked to come back to it. The vehicle was being run by his uncle at the time.

In revoking the licence on grounds of finance, Mr Pugh said that £4,892.59 was owed to the Busmasters by the company, which trades as The Midland Bus Co of 74 Regis Heath Road, Rowley Regis, Warley. In addition the insurance situation was "cloudy to say the least" and it was apparent that MBC1 was running side by side with Mibbo Singh Thandi's Transol.

When the MBC1 reappeared before Mr Pugh in Cardiff, director Ajmar Singh Thandi said brokers in Liverpool were prepared to insure vehicles in his name and he was willing to pay Busmasters.



Pugh: Granted MBC1 a stay of revocation

Mibbo Singh Thandi gave an assurance that he would not interfere with Ajmar's operations and Mr Pugh granted a stay of the revocation decision subject to the production of a receipt from Busmasters together with an insurance cover note. The commissioner said: "There is confusion in the Thandi empire and I have tried to untangle it."

Mr Ajmr Thandi said he will seek an O licence in his own name and withdraw the appeal.



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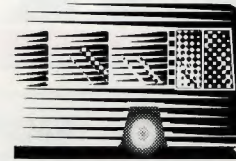
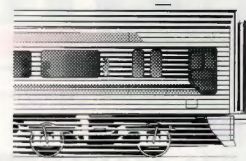
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INVITATION TO PROVIDE OPERATIONAL EXPERTISE IN DEVELOPING THE LEEDS SUPERTRAM PROJECT

Parliamentary Powers to construct and operate the first Leeds Supertram line to South Leeds have been obtained. A favourable grant application has been submitted to the Department of Transport and there is the prospect of private sector contributions to the project.

The South Leeds line is the first of 3 proposed and it is estimated to cost approximately 100m. The project is now being developed to the tender stage with a view to seeking tenders within 12 months. Operational expertise is now being sought to ensure the appropriate specification.

The PTE is seeking development partners who have the operational expertise to advise on an operating philosophy which can be translated into an operating plan and the track and electrical infrastructure necessary to implement the plan.

The development partner would become a member of the project management team and would be expected to finance its aspects of the work. Participation at this stage will not exclude the selected operator from competing for the operation of the system in due course.

Applications for more information and project brief should be forwarded to:-

**R. J. Pickup
Deputy Director General
West Yorkshire PTE,
Wellington House,
40/50 Wellington Street,
LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

The closing date responses to the project brief will be 14 September 1994.

(51160/A/TEN)

Tyne & Wear PTE's new DG

MICHAEL Parker, 46, (below) is to be the next director general of the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive, which is celebrating its silver jubilee. He is moving from head of operations at West Midlands PTE and replaces David Howard, who is retiring after being with the PTE since its formation.

Councillor Roy Burgess, chair of Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority, confirmed the appointment. He said: "He comes to us at a time when the transport in-



By Mike Morgan

dustory is facing new challenges and opportunities and I am confident he will continue to extend and develop the standard of high-quality transport provision that transport users in the Tyne and Wear have come to expect and demand."

Mr Parker's responsibilities at West Midlands PTE included local bus and rail services, travel services for people with disabilities, bus stations and passenger information. Before moving to the West Midlands he held a number of senior positions. He was London Underground communications strategy manager, London Transport International head of marketing and London Transport market development manager.

He said: "To be director general of a PTE at a time when more and more people are realising that public transport is the only option if the quality of urban life is to be improved, is very exciting."

Jacques' farewell

LONG-serving Salvador Caetano (UK) service manager **Peter Jacques**

was given an emotional send-off when he retired after over 20 years association with Caetano coaches.

Prior to his departure Mr Jacques made a farewell visit to the parent company's manufacturing plant in Gaia, Portugal where he was entertained and thanked for his contribution to Caetano's activities in the UK by the management of SC (Gaia), including founder and chairman Salvador Caetano.

His links with Caetano date back to the 1970s when he worked for the Moseley Group until 1986. During this time he was involved with leading British and Continental manufacturers - Plaxton, Duple, Bova and Van Hool, but his experience also encompassed the import of lesser known marques such as Unicar and Utic.



Peter Jacques: Retired

Former Jonckheere UK man, Peter Copperwheat, has taken over from Mr Jacques as service manager for SCUUK. He joined the company in April 1993 from Jonckheere (UK) Ltd.

Training manager

JIM Farley's appointment as training manager by Tyne & Wear-based Northumbria coincides with the closure of the company's Morpeth training centre and investment in a new facility at Ashington. He was previously district manager in Blyth.

Northumbria managing director Stephen Noble said: "Training has traditionally been a managed function within the operations department, but we are now giving it the independence to exploit commercial opportunities to the full. The new team has the real entrepreneurial skill to develop

even more flourishing business."

In addition to a programme of training for company employees, Northumbria provides commercial courses for PCV, LGV and fork-lift driver training - plus a range of management and supervisory skills training.

Mr Farley said: "We needed to make a significant investment in quality resources."

"We know that the most successful companies put real money into training, and we're now moving up a further stage from what was already a very strong foundation."

Ballard gets Mairs post

GRT Bus Group plc coaching subsidiary, Mairs Coaches of Aberdeen, has appointed Clive Ballard (right) general manager.

Mr Ballard is married with three children and claims to have fallen in love with Scotland already. He was previously traffic manager with Cheltenham District Traction after starting as a coach driver in 1985 and progressing through the company, gaining experience in various departments.



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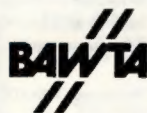
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